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## International Organization of Communications to the Press by Peace Societies.\*

By Lucien Le Foyer, formerly Deputy for Paris.

We can scarcely hope that the general press will open its columns to us every time that we desire for the explanation of pacifist teaching—even for free controversies on actual events. We cannot dream of “converting” the general press. We cannot make important journals into free platforms for the education of public opinion.

The opening by which, it would seem, we can enter important papers—and *all* the leading papers, even the most hostile—is “information.” The papers of today receive all kinds of information, even of disinterested origin and having a beneficial object in view. News transmitted by the agencies penetrates everywhere. The doors of newspaper offices are the holes dug for the telephone and telegraph wires.

The universal peace congresses have several times discussed this question of the transmission and communication to the press of news relating to peace and war. It has been generally agreed that it would be a very important piece of work, in order to dissipate certain dangerous misunderstandings among nations, to correct erroneous or one-sided statements put forward by governments or agencies in their pay, or of financial groups, and to make known the true feelings of the populations.

But it has appeared that the theoretical solutions hitherto discussed have not been found susceptible of practical application; for it is undeniable that this part of the international organization of pacifism is still very insufficient and rudimentary.

The creation of a pacifist agency has been suggested, charged with the duty of collecting news relating to international events and telegraphing it to the press.

Such an institution would be excellent in every way, but it would require considerable capital to be able to compete with the other agencies.

Is there not another solution of the problem? Yes—at least to a considerable degree. And this solution is the subject of the present proposal.

However great and legitimate may be our desire to create a new pacifist organ, let us first make use of those that we already possess.

The peace societies have not yet organized among themselves the international service of communications to the press.

The peace societies have scarcely begun, in their respective countries, to organize national communications to the press on better lines. We are not in a position to judge how far that service has been successful abroad. But we ought to remember that in France, in spite of important improvements brought about by the permanent delegation, we have thought it useful to put the question of the relations of pacifism and the press on the program of several national peace congresses.

Now, it is more necessary—and perhaps easier—to organize the international service of communications to the press. Is not the international domain properly our own? What it is important to get inserted in the

papers is not so much the propagandist efforts of peace societies here and there as information calculated to prevent or solve international disputes.

More than that, news of foreign origin has more chance of being accepted by the agencies and newspapers. The press is fond of news coming from a distance—or which has the appearance of coming from a distance. There is a French proverb which says: “He who comes from afar makes the best liar.” Falsehood has too long benefited by the credit enjoyed by news coming from abroad; it is high time that the truth got some of the advantage.

### *The Present Condition.*

At the present time, what outlines of the international organizations of communications to the press can be discovered?

We are employing, it would seem, four kinds of procedure:

There is first the exchange of private correspondence, by which pacifists inform each other from one country to another. But this method, however useful it may be, is slow, and only gives a limited circulation to news; it implies that the information thus transmitted will be subsequently communicated to the press by the receiver of the letter; but that is to state the problem, not to solve it.

We have our special reviews; and the Berne Bureau, in making an abstract of them, has had the admirable idea of adding to it a list of organs of all kinds which have given their adhesion to the peace movement. But this list is singularly inadequate, as the number of reviews and journals that can properly be called pacifist is unfortunately too limited; and it is the general press that we ought to aim at reaching.

The Berne Bureau publishes a review which is a valuable intermediary. But it is a monthly—that is to say, often too late for the circumstances—and there is no chance of getting anything inserted in important papers that has already appeared in a periodical sent to the public; papers only print what comes from their “special correspondents” or is sent to them by the agencies; neither of these directly address the public.

It comes to this, that telegrams, addresses, or appeals have been exchanged between the peace societies of different countries on the occasion of an event of international importance, then communicated to the press by the same people who had taken the initiative—as was done in difficult circumstances by Dr. A. Richter in Germany, and in France by M. Frédéric Passy and the writer of these lines, or more recently the German Peace Society and the permanent delegation of the French Peace Society themselves. But these interventions have an exceptional character, and, like the exchange of letters, involve without solving the question of communication to the press of the various countries interested.

We must, then, develop these outlines of international organization. There should be substituted for them a regular, complete, and permanent service.

### *The Organization to Be Established.*

The international organization of communications to the press can, in our view, be realized at once by the adoption of this twofold method:

\* A paper presented to the Twentieth Universal Peace Congress.

1. The peace societies should make a practice of sending direct to the peace societies of other countries—or at least to the central organs of the peace societies of each country—important and urgent news concerning peace and war, and of a kind calculated to correct and complete the news furnished by the agencies to the ordinary papers—whenever it is important to enlighten or undeceive public opinion. On the other hand, the peace societies should take in hand the measures necessary to insure the communication of such information to the press of their respective countries.

Let us dispose of any wrong interpretation of our idea. We are not concerned with instructing peace societies to dispense with the Berne Bureau as an intermediary. But we want to provide a means of rapid transmission of pressing news, to avoid a supplementary stage and a loss of time, in all cases where recourse to the "peace movement" is insufficient. And if this method relieves the Berne Bureau a little, so much the better!

It is evident that most frequently—even at times when diplomatic clouds have gathered over two countries and when it is important to warn the public opinion of the world—a peace society, however well organized and however rich, cannot dream of sending telegrams to the numerous peace societies which exist in the various civilized countries.

In practice, then, we see this service of news taking the following form: letters—more frequently than telegrams—addressed not to all the peace societies, but to the central organizations which represent them in each country.

The great international postal services are so rapid that in the majority of circumstances a letter will carry useful information quickly enough. The society receiving it can transmit it to the press as though it had been received by telegram. . . . Let no one be anxious on this point! More than once it has happened to the writer of these lines to send notes containing information from abroad to the leading papers—and without pretending that they had been received by telegraph. . . . On the following day he has discovered the notes in the papers with words: "From our Brussels correspondent" or "We have received a telegram from Berlin. . . ."

In most countries at the present time the peace societies have established a central national organization. And where they have not yet formed one, it is of great importance—especially for the object we are considering—that one should be created. In France there is the permanent delegation, in England the national council, in Switzerland the presidential section of the Swiss Peace Society, etc. Under one form or another, there is a group which assumes the function of intermediary between foreign countries and the national peace societies. It is a long time since our friend Moch maintained and proved the utility of a French peace bureau, a kind of principal—but not exclusive!—correspondent of the Berne Bureau. This rôle of intermediary, this function of simplification, is indispensable when we are concerned with a task demanding such rapidity as the international transmission of news.

Thus the central group, the representative national organization of the peace societies of one country, will telegraph or write, when there is need of it, to the analogous group in another country or to similar groups in

several other countries; and these will charge themselves with the transmission, in a suitable form, of the information received to the press of their respective countries.

Such is the first element of the organization.

2. The peace societies—especially their central groups—should get into communication with the correspondents of the foreign agencies and papers residing in their own countries, and should send direct to the office of the agencies and leading papers of other nations abroad information, notes, etc., likely to be inserted.

The double current of information which should be established internationally can thus be seen, the one going from pacifists to pacifists, the other from pacifists to the agencies and papers.

We certainly do not say that the pacifists up to now have never had relations with correspondents or directors of the leading agencies and papers. But we believe that these relations have only existed because of personal friendship, and that a systematic, general, international effort in this direction has never been tried.

To what extent are the most active and best informed among us familiar with the names, addresses, and the cast of mind of the correspondents of agencies and the leading foreign papers who live in the same town as ourselves? Which of our Parisian colleagues is capable of preparing such a list without a large number of omissions? There are the press annuals, often inaccurate and incomplete, which only give insufficient information on the respective worth of agencies and journals, which above all do not give any information on the ideas of the men who direct them, nor any means of entering into personal relations with them. It would be of enormous value if an English, German, or Swedish pacifist, for instance, knowing the working and tendencies of the agencies and leading papers of his country, could compare his information with that possessed by a French pacifist on the Paris correspondents of the same papers or the same agencies, and *vice versa*. By uniting, completing, and co-ordinating the data which we might have concerning the press, we should increase our influence to an enormous extent.

The pacifists in general are—it must be admitted—still less well informed on the leading papers and agencies of foreign countries than on the names of those of their directors or editors who might be, or already are, well disposed toward our ideas. One could not easily appreciate what the intervention of a foreign group might be on an agency or journal. It is possible that it might be mistrusted and would not be inserted; it is possible that from mere curiosity "*à titre documentaire*," or to show that information was possessed which another journal did not possess, it might be inserted in a good position, especially if owing to information furnished by the pacifists of the town in question the journal were well chosen. That is a path, it seems to us, which may perhaps lead us a long way. If certain pacifist groups or individuals could thus become, in a progressive way, occasional correspondents of certain important papers abroad we might see our activity strikingly increased.

It would then be of the greatest interest that a very wide inquiry be opened with the view of making known which are, in the chief towns of the different countries, the various agencies and journals, and in each of those

establishments the men who would welcome information sent by the peace societies of the same country acting as intermediaries, or sent direct by the peace societies of other countries. Such an inquiry would also furnish indications of local journalistic custom and on the best way of proceeding in order to obtain insertion.

Nobody is more qualified to recommend or decide on the institution of such an inquiry, essentially international in character, than a universal peace congress.

The elements and results of this preliminary inquiry could be collected at Berne and published in "The Peace Movement," in order that the peace societies might obtain the information that interested them. If certain information appeared to be of a confidential character (for example, indications relating to the mental outlook of directors or editors of papers and agencies), they could be sent to the peace societies by the Berne Bureau under cover or in the form of circulars. One can also imagine the peace societies at once applying the principles recommended here by communicating direct any information they possess concerning agencies and newspapers.

#### *Conclusions.*

The Hague Congress would then, in our opinion, do excellent work by examining, discussing, if need be completing, the present proposal, and by adopting the following resolutions:

1. The congress invites the peace societies, and especially their representative and central organizations (the formation of which should be encouraged), to circulate mutually and directly information intended for the general press, with the view of insuring the insertion of these communications in the correspondence of the agencies or in the leading journals of their respective countries.

2. The congress invites the peace societies to send information to the Berne Bureau, in order that the latter may collect, co-ordinate, and distribute it to the societies in a tabulated form; on the one hand, information concerning the correspondents of foreign agencies and journals residing in the town or country where the society exists, and their personal attitude toward pacifism; on the other hand, information concerning the telegraphic agencies and leading papers in their respective countries, as well as the opinions and tendencies of their directors and editors. If this inquiry were not directed and centralized by the Berne Bureau, the congress might invite the peace societies to communicate direct all kinds of useful information to each other.

### **The Peace Movement and the Press.\***

By Alfred H. Fried.

What we are mainly agitating for today is to win over the press and to combat the mischievous tendencies of certain of its organs. What is needed more than anything else, if international organization is to make rapid progress, is that a change should be effected in public opinion, and that men's minds should be educated. Now, the best and the most practical, but happily not the only, way of bringing this about is through the me-

dium of the columns of the daily papers. To lessen the risk of disputes arising between nations, and as far as possible to enable armed collisions to be avoided in future, it is necessary to counteract the ill effects of the hatred and misunderstanding disseminated by certain daily papers, with their habit of constant exaggeration. This has long been recognized by pacifists, who, ever since the peace movement has been organized, have been striving with this end in view. As long ago as 1843, indeed, that is seventy years since, the first International Peace Congress, which met in London, went thoroughly into this problem of the press.

The matter has since become still more urgent. The enormous improvement in journalistic methods has caused the rôle of the press in public life to attain the very first importance, and has greatly increased its influence on the mass of the people in general. Modern journalistic methods have shed much light on the life of the world today, and as a consequence they have likewise caused shadows to become visible. The speed with which news is transmitted has made the world smaller, and has brought the most distant countries nearer to us than were the outlying provinces of our native lands in the days of our grandfathers. This is the good side of modern methods of news-gathering. The bad side is that, with so many events happening in all quarters of the globe, it is only the most striking—in other words, the abnormal—occurrences which are reported, while the ordinary, every-day life of foreign peoples passes unnoticed in the crush of events one upon another. The educated man will be able to fill in the blanks for himself, and will likewise understand why news should be transmitted as it is; but the great mass of mankind, who are now able to read the newspapers for themselves, but who are incapable of interpreting them aright, must necessarily, owing to all these announcements of extraordinary events and exceptional happenings, form a conception of the world and its inhabitants which is not far removed from a caricature. Consequently they are led to despise and misjudge foreign nations and their institutions. To exploit such men when it is desired to dispose them favorably to a war is naturally an easy task for irresponsible individuals. Unfortunately it cannot be denied that the citizen of the twentieth century is less well informed about his contemporaries and their institutions than was the citizen of the eighteenth or seventeenth century, who imbibed his conceptions of other nations only from the faithful descriptions of men who wrote from actual personal observation, or from accounts of travels which dealt with the every-day life of the men of other countries, giving to extraordinary events and sensational occurrences only that back place which is all to which they are really entitled.

Despite the enormous development of facilities for travel, those belonging to different nations know one another only through the medium of the press. It is but a very small proportion who have an opportunity of becoming acquainted first-hand with peoples and countries other than their own. The rest derive their information from the newspapers. Thus the press has become the most important means of intercourse, putting forward as it does opinions and points of view which spread with lightning rapidity throughout the entire world.

The principles, however, by which the press today is guided are not so lofty as they should be in view of its

\* A paper read before the Twentieth Universal Peace Congress at The Hague, August 17-24, 1913.